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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0409
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2277
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1662
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP IMMEDIATE
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001767

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: SETTLING ACCOUNTS: OPPOSITION, NGO'S FEELING THE
PRESSURE

REF: A. BISHKEK 1705

[1](#)B. BISHKEK 1706

[1](#)C. BISHKEK 1741

BISHKEK 00001767 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: There is mounting evidence that the Kyrgyz Government is targeting key opposition figures in retribution for their roles in the early November anti-government demonstrations. While President Bakiyev told Parliament December 4 that rally participants would not be persecuted, he also warned that government authorities would deal with tax evasion and other issues "not related to the rally." In fact, over the past month, opposition and NGO leaders have complained of increased scrutiny from tax officials and, in some cases, repeated questioning by the National Security Service (SNB). Even opposition parliamentarians, who enjoy some measure of immunity, have approached us with stories of harassment, including beatings, perhaps to ensure their protection. The apparent harassment has not been limited to opposition leaders themselves; a prominent independent think tank has been visited by the financial police, and in another case, the wife of an opposition leader was arrested on tax charges connected to her furniture business. These developments have coincided with harassment of the local offices of NDI, IRI, and IFES by the Prosecutor General's office, following widespread allegations in the press that U.S. NGOs financed the November demonstrations. END SUMMARY.

THE HEAT IS ON

[1](#)2. (C) Following the opposition-led November 2-9 demonstrations that led to the compromise on a new constitution, there have been increased reports of harassment and personal attacks against opposition figures, local and international NGOs. Several opposition leaders, local NGO officials, and even MPs have spoken to us about selective

scrutiny from the tax authorities and the SNB. On December 7, the opposition For Reforms movement leaders held a press conference at which they complained about government harassment and citing a number of examples, including the dismissal of two oblast governors with opposition ties; repeated interrogation of and a break-in at the home of the director of NTS television (NTS is owned by an opposition MP); the detention of an opposition political party member; and the firing of state employees who supported the November rally.

13. (C) The SNB has repeatedly questioned several opposition leaders who were caught on tape allegedly talking about seizing government buildings during the November demonstration (the scandal surrounding the tape has now been dubbed "diskettegate"). We are aware that Deputies Tekebayev, Sariyev, and Eshimkanov have been interrogated by the SNB. Tekebayev has also told us that ethnic Uzbek deputies have been beaten and pressured by SNB officers, in an effort by the government to reassert control over the parliament. Edil Baisalov, head of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, told us that there was nothing incriminating in the taped conversation, that it was merely a debate about possible tactics and responses. Baisalov said that although some opposition members called for a forceful takeover of the state television station, the idea was dismissed almost immediately. Nevertheless, Baisalov thought that the SNB would eventually use that part of the conversation to justify their actions. He has hired a retired SNB Colonel as his attorney in the matter. Others have said that they are willing to cooperate in an investigation of the conversation, but are concerned that the SNB will soon change them from "witnesses" to objects of the investigation. The SNB has also shown interest in their NGOs, including Cholpon Jakupova's Adilet Legal Clinic, and

BISHKEK 00001767 002.2 OF 003

Asiya Sasykbayeva's "Interbilim" Center, requesting detailed information about each organization's programs and complement of staff, according to the opposition figures.

14. (C) Baisalov was assaulted and had his bag stolen in the Osh airport on December 1. He told us that he had been confronted earlier in the day at a meeting in Jalalabad by purported pro-government activists, and at the time of the assault in the airport, the airport security guard had disappeared, an unusual occurrence. In addition, when he tried the next day to get a copy of the airport video surveillance tape, he was told that the tape had been lost.

TAX INVASION

15. (C) Kyrgyz tax authorities have also zeroed in on opposition figures and their relatives. On December 4, the wife of "For Reforms" movement coordinator Omurbek Abdarahmanov was arrested for tax evasion, in connection with a large furniture business owned by the Abdarahmanovs. Only after opposition parliamentarians Omurbek Tekebayev, Bolotbek Sherniyazov and Melis Eshimkanov came to her aid -- and the arrest was broadcast on TV -- was she released. Two days later, on December 6, the director of the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) Chinara Jakypova told us that the financial police visited her office, demanded a review of IPP's financial documents and asked a number of pointed questions perceived by IPP to be unrelated to financial matters. IPP, while independent, has been critical of the opposition, the Bakiyev administration, and the manner in which the new constitution was drafted and adopted. NGO leaders, like Raya Kydyrova, director of Foundation for Tolerance International, suggested that the government is following the Uzbek model of setting traps and exploiting vulnerabilities based on a lack of knowledge on the part of NGOs about certain detailed provisions of the tax code. She noted that large, mostly Bishkek-based organizations were able to hire accountants and lawyers to ensure compliance,

while smaller organizations would more easily fall prey to the government's scrutiny. Kydyrova reported that repeated questioning by the financial police has made her own accountant worried about her job and personal security -- two effects that reveal that the government's intimidation tactics are working.

CIRCUMVENTING IMMUNITIES

16. (C) While the SNB and tax authorities have targeted those without immunities, organizations connected to opposition parliamentarians have also come under close scrutiny as well.

As a result of the increased attention, some parliamentarians have already approached us to ensure their story is heard by others, perhaps for protection. MP Omurbek Babanov -- whose media outlet, NTS, broadcast the demonstration live and had its electricity cut off during the rally -- told us that his MVD-supplied bodyguards were removed, despite the fact that he paid their salaries. He has since hired private protection. Additionally, Deputy Speaker Alymbekov detailed a murky privatization dispute to the Ambassador, involving a minerals company in his district that has links to President Bakiyev (see Ref C). Although Alymbekov has not been an outspoken critic of the Bakiyev administration, his opposition to the deal most certainly could put him at odds with the particular factions within the government. Opposition MP Melis Eshimkanov has complained that his newspaper, Agim, is under attack, though this may be related to the paper's coverage of the government electricity company.

COMMENT

BISHKEK 00001767 003.2 OF 003

17. (C) The governments of former President Akayev and present President Bakiyev are no strangers to putting a great deal of pressure on their political opponents. Policy analyst and former director of the International Institute for Strategic Research Valentin Bogatyryov told us that "it would be strange if they didn't do this." However, the Kyrgyz opposition appears ready to stand up for itself. The impression that we get is that the harder government forces push, the sharper the reaction will be on the part of the opposition. There are already discussions of renewed demonstrations in the spring.

18. (C) The apparent harassment of the opposition and NGOs through selective enforcement of the law, coupled with the Prosecutor General's ongoing investigations into NDI, IRI, and IFES (Ref B), raises questions about the commitment of the government (or, more accurately, of some elements in the government) to pursue compromise with the opposition and move forward on democratic reforms. Following the fleeting high point of political compromise over the new constitution, the political atmosphere has become even more contentious than it was previously.

19. (C) We raise the issue of apparent harassment on a continuing basis with the government and make the point that the law should be applied equally to all -- whether they are supporters or opponents of the president. Selective application of the law to the president's opponents is in and of itself harassment. The pressure tactics that at least some in the government are employing are, in the end, self-defeating, as it raises the political tensions until they boil over into the street demonstrations we have seen for the last year and a half. Other like-minded ambassadors and international organizations (Germans, EC, Turks, and UN) see the same trend and have committed to the Ambassador to raise the issue with the Kyrgyz Government. If the harassment continues, we will recommend a formal demarche to Kyrgyz authorities at a time when it would be most effective. At this point, we will continue to monitor the situation

very closely.
YOVANOVITCH